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RHODE ISLAND ELECTS HUNT TO EPISCOPACY

PROVIDENCE, R.I. -- The Rev. George N. Hunt III of San Francisco will become the eleventh Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island upon his consecration next year.

Father Hunt, who is Executive Officer of the Diocese of California, was elected to the episcopacy on the second ballot at a special convention at the Cathedral Church of St. John here on Nov. 30.

He has accepted his election, subject to the required consents of diocesan bishops and standing committees.

Upon his consecration he will succeed the late Bishop Frederick H. Belden who died on November 4. Bishop Belden had announced his retirement and the special convention had been called to elect a bishop coadjutor to succeed him. Bishop Belden died in a Denver hospital after being stricken with a heart attack in September during the meeting of the General Convention.

Father Hunt was one of three candidates nominated to the convention by the search committee and two priests were nominated from the floor.

On the first ballot, Father Hunt received a majority of the lay votes and was but five short in the clerical order. The Rev. Gordon J. Stenning of St. Mary's, Portsmouth, R.I., received 39 lay votes and 24 clerical votes on the first ballot. Others receiving votes were the Rev. Ledlie Laughlin, St. Luke-in-the-Fields, New York City, the Rev. Howard C. Olsen, St. Barnabas Church, Warwick, R.I., and the Rev. Ralph E. Hutton, St. Barnabas Church, Scottsdale, Ariz.

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Father Hunt easily secured the required majorities in each of the two orders on the next ballot and was declared the winner.

Father Hunt's name was one of those submitted by the Church Deployment Office's computer in response to the diocese's request for profiles. Thus, he becomes the third priest identified by that office's computer who has been elected to the episcopacy. Bishop Donald J. Davis of Erie and Bishop William H. Clark of Delaware had previously been identified in that manner.

Father Hunt, 48, is a native of Louisville, Ky., and received his education at the University of the South, Sewanee, Tenn., and Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexandria, Va.

In 1955 he married Barbara Noel Plamp and they have three children.

His parish ministry has been in the Dioceses of Wyoming and California. While at St. Paul's, Salinas, Calif., where he was rector from 1970 to 1975, Bishop C. Kilmer Myers appointed him Executive Officer of the Diocese of California and he served in that post, part-time and then full-time, until his election to the episcopacy.

Father Hunt was a strong candidate for the episcopacy in the Diocese of California last April 28. In that election, the convention was deadlocked on the 16th ballot between him and the Rev. William Swing of Washington. Father Hunt, noting that situation, said that instead of adjourning for two weeks -- with the probable result that the diocese would again become bitterly divided -- he would withdraw and request a unanimous vote for Father Swing. Father Swing was elected by acclamation and will soon succeed Bishop Myers.

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